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ABSTRACT

The current situation of foreign language education at all educational levels in the United States, is examined with emphasis on new developments in instruction, testing, and program design. In a section titled "The Foreign Language Crisis," the combination of declining foreign language enrollment and increasing need for language skills in international business and relations is examined. A section entitled "Foreign Language Studies--A Short History" outlines the development of foreign languages as a field of study and the increasing interest in teaching and testing methods in the academic and military sectors. "The New Methodologies" briefly outlines such techniques as the direct method, confluent approach, suggestopedia, and total physical response. A section on "Testing for Oral Proficiency" describes recent efforts to refine testing methods, particularly by drawing on the Foreign Service Institute's Oral Proficiency Interview and providing teachers with professional development opportunities in this area. Two outstanding high school foreign language programs are noted in "Blue Ribbon Language Programs," and four cities are highlighted in "Immersion Programs." In "In the Colleges," the crucial college language programs are criticized for lack of leadership in promoting foreign language study. A section entitled "Oral Proficiency Testing in the Peace Corps" describes the Educational Testing Service's initial involvement in oral proficiency testing and its results. Rider College's annual forensic contest for high school language students is outlined in "Colleges Sponsor Foreign Languages Competitions." (MSE)

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Foreign Languages in the Schools

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE SCHOOLS

by Albert Benderson

1 **The Foreign Language Crisis**
2 **Foreign Language Studies—A Short History**
7 **The New Methodologies**
10 **Testing for Oral Proficiency**
16 **Blue Ribbon Language Programs**
19 **Immersion Programs**
24 **In the Colleges**

12 **ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTING IN THE PEACE CORPS**
22 **COLLEGES SPONSOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETITION**

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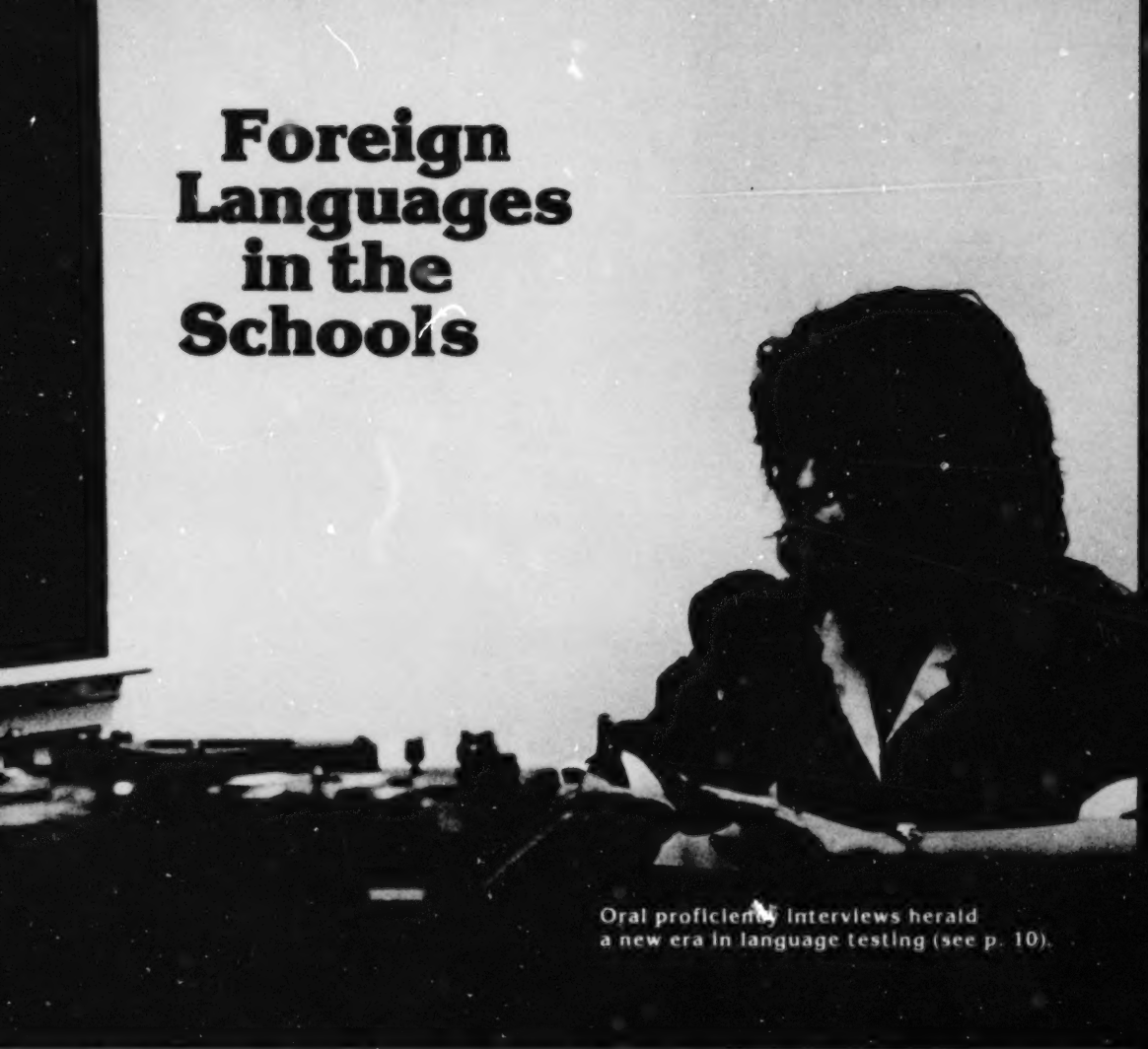
"In Paris they simply stared I never did succeed in making own language."

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CRISIS

The study of foreign languages has traditionally been relegated to the bottom of the priority list in American education. Isolated from Europe and Asia by the oceans for most of their history, large numbers of Americans have long believed that English is the only language worth knowing. The emergence of English as the

Foreign Languages in the Schools



Oral proficiency interviews herald a new era in language testing (see p. 10).

hen I spoke to them in French; ose idiots understand their

—Mark Twain

international *lingua franca* after World War II has generally served to reinforce the notion that you could get by almost anywhere in the world by speaking English. Even during the halcyon decade of foreign language study in America, from 1958 to 1968, only 27.7 percent of high school students were enrolled in foreign language courses.

Moreover, those who studied a foreign language in school usually discovered when travelling abroad that they, like Twain, had not really learned to speak the language at all. Few were capable of conducting even rudimentary conversations with native speakers. Some may well have concluded that studying a foreign language in high school or college had, indeed, been a waste of time.

The current world economic situation, however, is making it difficult for Americans to remain apathetic about our

neglect of foreign language studies. America's former dominance of the global economy is rapidly being challenged by Western, Japanese, and Third World competitors who number among their weapons large numbers of multilingual salesmen. Although American businessmen still expect their overseas customers to do business in English, their opposite numbers in Europe and the Orient are rigorously trained in the client's tongue.

Congressman Paul Simon (D., Illinois) outlines the scope of the problem in his book, *The Tongue-Tied American*. He points out, for instance, that in New York City alone there are approximately 10,000 Japanese salesmen—all of whom speak English. Yet, in Japan there are only about 1,000 American salesmen, and few speak Japanese. He quotes a Japanese businessman as saying, "'. . .the most useful international language in world trade is not necessarily English, but rather it is the language of your client.'" Simon suggests that the comparative success of the Japanese in the world market during the last few years reflects, in part, this sales philosophy.

In addition to contributing to our trade deficit, Simon argues that America's monolingualism increasingly isolates us scientifically and culturally to the extent that our national security is threatened. As more nations acquire advanced technology, the percentage of technical journals published in English is declining, and many of the new ones are written in languages, such as Japanese, Russian, Portuguese, and Chinese, that are generally ignored in American schools.

Simon presents a survey of foreign language programs in 76 nations that reveals how far ahead of the United States even economically strapped Third World countries are when it comes to second-language education. Although less than four percent of American high school graduates have more than two years of a foreign language, Afghanistan requires English, French, and German starting in elementary school; Niger requires two foreign languages in secondary school; the Sudan requires three years of English and French in secondary schools; and Guinea-Bissau requires Portuguese in the elementary schools and both English and French in the secondary schools.

Our deficiencies in foreign language education are, to a certain extent, a reflection of the state of American education as a whole. In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, appointed by Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell to examine the American educational system and recommend reforms, released a devastating report that blasted the inadequacies of American education as a threat to the nation's future. "We have," they wrote, "in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament."

The commission argued that achieving proficiency in a foreign language takes from four to six years of study and suggested that this work begin in the elementary grades. "We believe it is desirable that students achieve such proficiency because study of a foreign language introduces students to nonEnglish-speaking cultures, heightens awareness and comprehension of one's native tongue, and serves the nation's needs in commerce, diplomacy, defense, and education."

"For the college bound," the commission added, "two years of foreign language study in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier."

At present, however, even students who have studied foreign languages for several years find that they are unable to converse fluently. Ninety percent of the college seniors in a 1980 ETS survey of global awareness, measuring their knowledge of world affairs, reported having studied a language in college. Only one-third, however, said that they could order a restaurant meal in a foreign language, and only 11 percent believed themselves capable of discussing what they planned to be doing five years in the future, using the appropriate tenses. This inability to converse in a foreign tongue, despite years of language training, suggests faulty and ineffectual teaching methodologies.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES —A SHORT HISTORY

Writing for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Judith Liskin-Gasparro, an ETS examiner

and foreign language specialist, reports that historians have traced foreign language teaching methodologies back to the ancient Sumerians of 3000 B.C. In many respects the ancients employed teaching techniques that would be considered quite progressive by today's standards, she contends.

"Whether foreign languages were learned by conquering peoples or, as was the case centuries later in Renaissance Europe, by young men as part of their education," she writes, "the goal of instruction seemed to be largely practical communicative ability. A kind of 'direct method' was employed, in which the learner spent long periods of time conversing with a native-speaking tutor. . . .Textbooks in use until the beginning of the nineteenth century were written mostly in the foreign language, and. . . evidence indicates that ideas in force about foreign language teaching in the Renaissance period and up into the eighteenth century would seem surprisingly modern to today's educators concerned about the teaching of language proficiency." ("The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: An Historical Perspective," written for *Teaching for Proficiency: The Organizing Principle*, Volume 15 of the *ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series*.)

During the eighteenth century neoclassical period, however, the goals of language study began to shift away from oral communication. This shift reflected a transition in the study of Latin that had begun in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As fewer and fewer people spoke the language, schools began to teach it as primarily a written, rather than a spoken language. By the late eighteenth century a grammar-translation method of teaching the language had evolved, and during the nineteenth century this became the sole methodology. Primary objectives were the mastery of Latin grammar and the reading and translation of classical texts.

By the nineteenth century, according to Liskin-Gasparro, the study of Latin came to be regarded as a mental discipline that developed the intellectual capacity of the student. "When the modern foreign languages began to achieve a greater prominence in the curriculum," she writes, "this same justification for study was

JUDITH LISKIN-GASPARRO

". . . evidence indicates that ideas in force about foreign language teaching in the Renaissance period and up into the eighteenth century would seem surprisingly modern to today's educators concerned about the teaching of language proficiency."

applied to them."

In other words, with respect to teaching methodology, the living languages became indistinguishable from those no longer spoken.

"Nineteenth-century textbook compilers," writes Renzo Titone in *Teaching Foreign Languages*, "were mainly determined to codify the foreign language into frozen rules of morphology and syntax to be explained and eventually memorized. Oral work was reduced to an absolute minimum, while a handful of written exercises, constructed at random, came as a sort of appendix to the rules."

This grammar-translation method maintained its dominance in American education throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that Americans, throughout this period, were learning only to read and not to communicate orally in another language, the method was not seriously challenged until World War II.

New Priorities

During the war, the Army, faced with the need to communicate in a host of languages, soon discovered that few of its personnel had been prepared in school to converse fluently in foreign languages. The Army Language School was established to train soldiers in conversational language skills as rapidly as possible, and in order to accomplish this it drew upon methods that had been developed by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) shortly before the war.

According to Liskin-Gasparro, the method was based on the notion that language was essentially a set of habits, or learned behaviors, and that students should be exposed to spoken language long before they are exposed to writing. This was thought to reproduce the natural sequence in which children learn language. The method emphasized intensive drills and conversations, as well as the memorization of conversations and linguistic patterns even before students understood the meaning of what they were saying.

These techniques proved highly successful at the Army Language School and later served as the basis for teaching methods used to train diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute. They also evolved into the audiolingual movement that was to transform foreign language teaching at many schools a decade later.

In 1957, the launching of Sputnik made Americans aware overnight of the growing inadequacy of their educational system. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed that year to pump federal funds into areas of education related to the national interest, and foreign languages were among the beneficiaries of the windfall.

Many of the funds earmarked for foreign language studies were poured into new instructional materials based on the audiolingual movement that emerged from the Army Language School. For the first time, many secondary schools revised their foreign language curricula to give conversational skills precedence over reading and translation. Language labs, designed to provide students with additional opportunities for practice in speech and pronunciation, sprang up throughout the country. In 1957 there were 60 such labs in secondary schools; five years later the number had mushroomed to 6,000. Enrollments in foreign language courses increased from 16.5 percent to 27.7 percent in the years between 1958 and 1968.

Decline and Fall

As the '60s ended, however, the nationwide support and enthusiasm for foreign language studies had already begun to wane. By 1968, the money allocated to foreign language studies had been cut off and reallocated to other areas deemed to have greater importance to the national welfare.

A couple of years later, in 1970, advocates of the audiolingual approach were rocked by the publication of a report by the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project, established to determine whether the audiolingual approach, in fact, represented a pedagogical advance over traditional teaching methods. Philip D. Smith, the project coordinator, concluded in *A Comparison of the Cognitive and Audiolingual Approaches to Foreign Language Instruction* that extensive rseearch revealed audiolingualism to be no better than, and in some cases not as

good as, traditional methods of instruction that evolved from the grammar-translation approach. "Students achieved most in the 'traditional' strategy despite individual differences in ability," said Smith.

As for the shiny new language labs that had consumed many of the dollars allocated for second language instruction, Smith said, "The language laboratory systems employed had no measurable effect on achievement on tests of listening, reading, vocabulary, or grammar after one year of French or German instruction."

Moreover, the cultural climate of the late '60s and early '70s was not congenial to foreign language studies. Some radical educators denounced the discipline as elitist. Secondary school and college officials, anxious to placate rebellious students, dispensed with requirements for many difficult courses, including foreign languages.

According to Jane N. Lippman's "Rationale for Language Study" in a 1974 ACTFL publication, *The Challenge of Communication*, a Modern Language Association (MLA) survey of language requirements, conducted in 1970, revealed that 14.6 percent of the 786 colleges responding had already dropped the foreign language requirement for the B.A. degree and another 30.8 percent had

reduced it. Congressman Simon reports in his book that college foreign language enrollments declined 44 percent between 1963 and 1974. At some colleges, programs in relatively unpopular languages, such as Russian, began to disappear.

Perhaps it is only a coincidence that America's decline as an international economic power in the '70s paralleled this decline in foreign language studies. Nevertheless, by the late '70s, concern over the neglect of foreign languages in the schools was rising again. President Carter, embarrassed by poor translation in Poland, appointed a Presidential Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies in 1978 to evaluate the state of foreign language education and to determine its impact upon "the nation's internal and external strength."

In 1979, the commission published a 150-page report, *Strength through Wisdom*, brimming with detailed recommendations for improving foreign language studies at every educational level. Declaring that "America's incompetence in foreign languages is scandalous, and it is becoming worse," the commission recommended that schools and colleges reinstitute foreign language requirements and that special high schools be established in major population centers to offer intensive and advanced language and international studies programs.

In addition, the commission provided detailed recommendations for improving foreign language and international education at every grade level from kindergarten through college, including the establishment of six comprehensive, statewide model programs to spread international education throughout the school curriculum.

The commission also proposed that the federal government fund 20 regional centers to upgrade the language and teaching competencies of those in the field and that these should be supplemented by federally funded summer institutes. It proposed federal support for experimentation in teaching methodologies and backed the development of foreign language proficiency tests to "report on, monitor, and assess foreign language teaching in the U.S."

The report, like those published by many other presidential commissions, stirred a flurry of concern in the press and among educators about just how badly America's traditionally weak effort in foreign languages had been damaged by the untimely cut-off of NDEA funds. Unlike the recommendations of many presidential commissions, however, its work was not forgotten once the uproar died down.

For one thing, a national survey conducted in April 1979 by the University of Michigan Research Center, and released about the same time as the commission's report, indicated strong support among the general public for foreign language studies. It revealed that half of all Americans wished they could speak a foreign language and three-quarters believed languages should be taught as early as the elementary school. Forty percent thought foreign languages should be required in elementary school. Moreover, 90 percent agreed that languages should be taught in junior or senior high, and 47 percent believed they should be required.

Overall, the survey reflected potentially widespread popular support for many of the actions recommended in the presidential commission's report.

Although few of its goals have been realized, commission proposals continue to be promoted in Congress by the Joint National Committee for Languages, headquartered in Washington, D.C. "As with most presidential commissions," says David Edwards, a committee lobbyist, "the legislation has gone in different directions from its specific recommendations, but the overall thrust is still based upon its proposals."

The 96th Congress passed a concurrent resolution that it was the sense of Congress that foreign language studies in the United States had to be improved. The National Institute of Education was mandated to study what needs to and can be done.

In the 97th Congress, 70 bills affecting language study were passed, including a bill to create a reserve of foreign language experts for the intelligence services so that a pool of expert translators in all vital languages will be constantly available to the government.

In the current 98th Congress, there is a

Congressman Paul Simon
Author of *The Tongue-Tied American*

strong possibility that history might repeat itself with respect to foreign languages. As in the Sputnik era, political pressure is growing to reverse perceived declines in mathematics and science education. According to Edwards, it looks like support for foreign languages will be included in an emergency math and science bill reminiscent of the NDEA and designed to improve teacher skills.

A separate bill, also pending in Congress, would provide $50 million in aid for foreign language training in the interest of national security and economic growth. The money would be divided among model programs in elementary and secondary schools and community colleges, colleges and universities with language requirements, summer institutes for superior high school students, summer institutes for high school teachers, and foreign exchange programs to heighten skills in languages deemed to be of critical importance.

Edwards expects the bill to pass the House this year, although he is not as confident of its future in the Senate. "It has taken a year or two," he says, "for the presidential commission's recommendations to generate a momentum of their own, and then you need a Paul Simon to keep them alive."

THE NEW METHODOLOGIES

All this activity in the halls of Congress is paralleled by an unprecedented proliferation of new teaching methodologies in the halls of academe. The demise of the strict audiolingual method has paved the way for a host of new methods incorporating techniques from fields as diverse as hypnosis, yoga, Gestalt psychology, and sensitivity training.

Teachers who use *the direct method*, for instance, use only the targeted second language in the classroom. Students are expected to do the same. Heavy use is made of question-and-answer techniques, and even the meanings of words must be explained in the target language. In the most doctrinaire classes, there are no formal explanations of grammatical rules; students must learn them inductively after being presented with numerous illustrative examples. Students are expected to absorb the language, including proper pronunciation, and classroom teachers must have native, or near-native, speaking abilities.

The *confluent approach* is derived from the sensitivity training and values clarification movements of the '70s. Students participate in various group activities designed to elicit honest interpersonal communication. "Students in confluent language classes explore and discuss various aspects of themselves, as well as less personal information, in the target language," writes Beverly Galyean in her *Foreign Language Annals* article "A Confluent Approach to Curriculum Design."

All classroom activities, including grammar lessons and written exercises, are used as vehicles to develop self-awareness and self-expression, so that students learn

CHARLES W. STANSFIELD

"Everyone is looking for the panacea—the quick and dirty method of teaching a language."

about themselves while learning a new language. "Two empirical studies," says Galyean, "indicate that students taught via confluent methods tend to score significantly higher on tests of oral and written communicative competence, and show greater growth in self-identification, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and attitudes toward the class."

Teachers using "*the silent way*," attempt to lead students to speak the language and absorb linguistic patterns through verbal exercises focused on classroom materials including rods and bars of various colors and lengths. The exercises enable the students to generate original statements based on a minimal vocabulary provided by the teacher, who does not do a lot of the talking. The teacher becomes progressively more silent, while student participation and involvement increases.

Suggestopedia

Perhaps the most original of the new methods is the "*suggestopedia*" approach developed by Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian physician and psychologist who directs that country's Institute of Suggestology. Lozanov claims that his methods are derived from yoga exercises that greatly enhance memory capacity. Myrna Lynn Hammerman, however, suggests in her master's paper, "Hypnosis and Language Learning," that his approach essentially uses hypnotic and subliminal learning techniques, some of which are based upon Soviet research into hypnopedia or sleep-learning.

In an attempt to open up the subconscious to memorization of new material, students are placed in a relaxed environment characterized by soft lighting, cheerful decor, and eighteenth century baroque music. Whispered suggestions, below the threshold of conscious hearing, are often used to overcome mental blocks and enhance unconscious mental activity.

The teacher assumes an authoritarian role in the classroom, distancing himself from the students while remaining sympathetic and understanding. "One of the purposes of this," writes Hammerman, "is to put the student in the role of the child wherein it is believed by the scientists at the Institute of Suggestology that he will overcome the limitations of

human memory and regress to a stage at which memorization is more spontaneous. This is called Infantilization."

Lozanov claims his method speeds up learning 50 times, increases retention, requires no special equipment, and reaches students at all intellectual levels, including the retarded, with virtually no effort on their part.

Other research results have not been so positive. Michael J. Wagner and Germaine Tilney report in the March 1983 issue of *TESOL Quarterly* that their research showed traditional methods to be more effective than Lozanov's "Superlearning" techniques. "When modes of presentation were compared, those taught by a traditional classroom method learned significantly more vocabulary than those taught by Superlearning techniques... Although scrupulous care to preserve 'Superlearning' methodology was taken in this investigation, accelerated learning could not be substantiated."

Nevertheless, Hammerman reports that an adaption of the Lozanov method, employing the power of suggestion in the classroom, is being tried in a few schools in Texas, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, California, and Iowa.

Total Physical Response

Another revolutionary teaching methodology, with considerable support from American researchers, is the *total physical response method,* developed by psychologist James J. Asher. This method is based on the belief that students should learn a second language in the same sequence that they learn their native language as infants. Listening comprehension, therefore, is developed before speech.

Typically, during the first few weeks of a total physical response class, students are taught to follow an increasingly complex series of commands, designed to convey an understanding of grammar and vocabulary. According to David Wolfe, who uses the method to teach French at Moorestown (New Jersey) High School, "Commands are used to imbed features of the language because comprehension naturally precedes language production. Babies spend a couple of years listening before they produce. Then one day they put it all together. They understand the

LEE L. SCHROEDER

"The (Foreign Service Institute) scale measures the ability to talk about such things as politics, but this is not relevant to kids."

language long before they speak."

In Wolfe's first-year class, students spend the first three weeks responding to commands beginning with "Stand up!" and "Sit down!" and progressing to "Write your name with the red pencil on the white sheet of paper under my name." Eventually they move on to conversation and grammar, and the amount of time spent in physical response is gradually reduced.

"When comprehension is strong, speech will emerge on its own," says Wolfe. "If you force people to speak too early in a foreign language course, they become overmonitors. They become too conscious that they must speak well and spend too much time formulating answers that will be grammatically perfect. A person who spends more time listening to correct usage will learn it faster."

Judith Olmsted Gary writes in "Why Speak If You Don't Have To? The Case for a Listening Approach to Foreign Language Learning," Chapter 12 of *Second Language Acquisition Research*, "Research has shown that language learners *not required* to speak immediately—though they *are allowed* to if they wish—make more significant gains in reading, writing, and speaking, as well as in listening comprehension, than students required to speak right away in an audiolingual approach."

Gary says that the students engage in active listening, meaning that they attempt to understand and respond physically to the teacher's instructions. According to her, the period of delayed oral practice may last as long as three months, depending upon student readiness and the intensity of the classes.

"There is strong empirical evidence," she writes, "that having to focus simultaneously on speaking performance and on listening comprehension distracts the learner from his main objective of understanding the language system underlying what he is hearing."

"Everyone is looking for the panacea—the quick and dirty method of learning a language," counters ETS program administrator Charles W. Stansfield. "Going back to childhood is the underlying theme of most of the new methodologies. Adults don't learn the same way children do. They tend to want to intellectualize. Although teaching should be conversationally oriented, adults will want to know the grammatical rules as well."

Recent research seems to support Stansfield's argument. New findings, in fact, suggest that people of different ages have different learning styles and that, contrary to myth, children are not necessarily more adept at learning foreign languages than adults. For instance, Judith Chun reports in her *Modern Language Journal* article, "A Survey of Research in Second Language Acquisition," that "different aspects of language are best learned at different ages depending on biological, cognitive, affective, and social factors."

Although total physical response and other new teaching methodologies may seem pretty far-out to some language teachers, Protase E. Woodford of ETS, author of many Spanish textbooks, says, "I don't dismiss anything. If anything gets me angry, it's when people become dogmatic about methodology. You have to be open enough to consider new methods and choose from those that suit your style. Never reject anything out of hand because it sounds weird. Something about it might be useful. What matters is the result."

While it is too early for the new, avant-garde methodologies to have been adapted by very many schools, Woodford's attitude is reflected, to some degree, in the curricula of many language programs today. With the demise of the rigid audiolingual method, language teachers tend to take a broad, fairly eclectic approach.

As Lowell Hoeft, who teaches a highly regarded French program at Seymour High School in Seymour, Wisconsin, puts it, "Something I read may give me an idea, and I try to implement it in the classroom. I never think of it as related to any particular theory; I just do it."

TESTING FOR ORAL PROFICIENCY

While rote memorization and pattern drills have been largely abandoned, secondary-school teachers have generally maintained the conversational orientation of audiolingualism rather than return to a traditional approach that produces decent readers but few competent speakers of second languages. This conversational

orientation, in fact, remains the most enduring legacy of audiolingualism.

It does, however, pose at least one basic problem for the educator. What is the most effective way to assess oral proficiency? Clearly the conventional written exam, whether essay or multiple-choice, will not do.

One might also ask what standard the students will be measured against. Testing the oral proficiency of a student is far more complex than simply determining whether he or she has mastered a particular set of facts. Language teachers have had to wrestle with this question ever since the Army Language School first made the development of oral and aural skills its top priority. In 1956, the State Department ordered the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which had adapted the Army's audiolingual method for the training of its personnel, to devise an instrument to gauge the second language skills of foreign service officers. In response, the institute developed an oral interview test graded on a five-point scale that eventually became the standard for many other government agencies.

The scale covers the complete range of speaking ability from 0 (no functional ability in the language) to 5 (speaking proficiency equivalent to that of a well-educated native). It is so demanding that many Americans would probably rate no higher than a 3 in English—"able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics."

The scale was first used in educational testing during the '60s. At the height of NDEA funding, the Modern Language Association published guidelines for teacher education programs in the modern languages, designating seven areas in which teachers should have at least minimal competency. At the top of the list were aural understanding and speaking. ETS then helped the MLA develop foreign language proficiency tests for teachers and advanced students covering skills in all areas.

In the test of speaking ability, tapes were made of examinees answering questions in the appropriate foreign tongue. The tapes were then sent to ETS

PROTASE E. WOODFORD

"We want to get schools to emphasize oral skills. We don't care how they do it."

for grading according to a scale derived from the FSI scale. A competent foreign language teacher could be expected to score about 2+, not a particularly high score.

With the spread of bilingual education programs in the '70s, ETS began getting requests to develop testing programs to certify the oral proficiency of prospective teachers. To date, programs have been developed in Texas and New Jersey. In addition, ETS technical assistance in training oral proficiency testers has been used by other states and school districts that have developed their own programs.

Refining the Scale

At the same time, with the increase in conversationally oriented high school courses, the need was growing for a similar instrument that could be used to evaluate the speaking proficiency of students.

The FSI scale, however, was not suitable for this purpose because it was insufficiently sensitive to distinguish between different levels of performance at the low end. According to Liskin-Gasparro, an ETS study of oral proficiency among first- and second-year high school Spanish students indicated that none had reached even Level 1 on the FSI scale, yet there were obvious differences in their communicative ability.

This conclusion was reinforced by the results of the Common Yardstick Project, an ambitious attempt by representatives of British, German, and American organizations, including ETS, to develop a descriptive scale of language ability that would apply to any tongue. Eventually recognizing the complexity of developing scales to measure oral, listening, reading, and writing abilities, project representatives decided to concentrate on an oral scale. They settled upon a modified version of the FSI scale, with increased sensitivity in the 0-2 range. ETS project director Woodford describes this range as "the area in which most second-language speakers can expect to fall after taking advantage of the range of academic courses and extracurricular activities usually offered in secondary schools and colleges."

The "0" level was subdivided into three

Oral Proficiency Testing in the Peace Corps

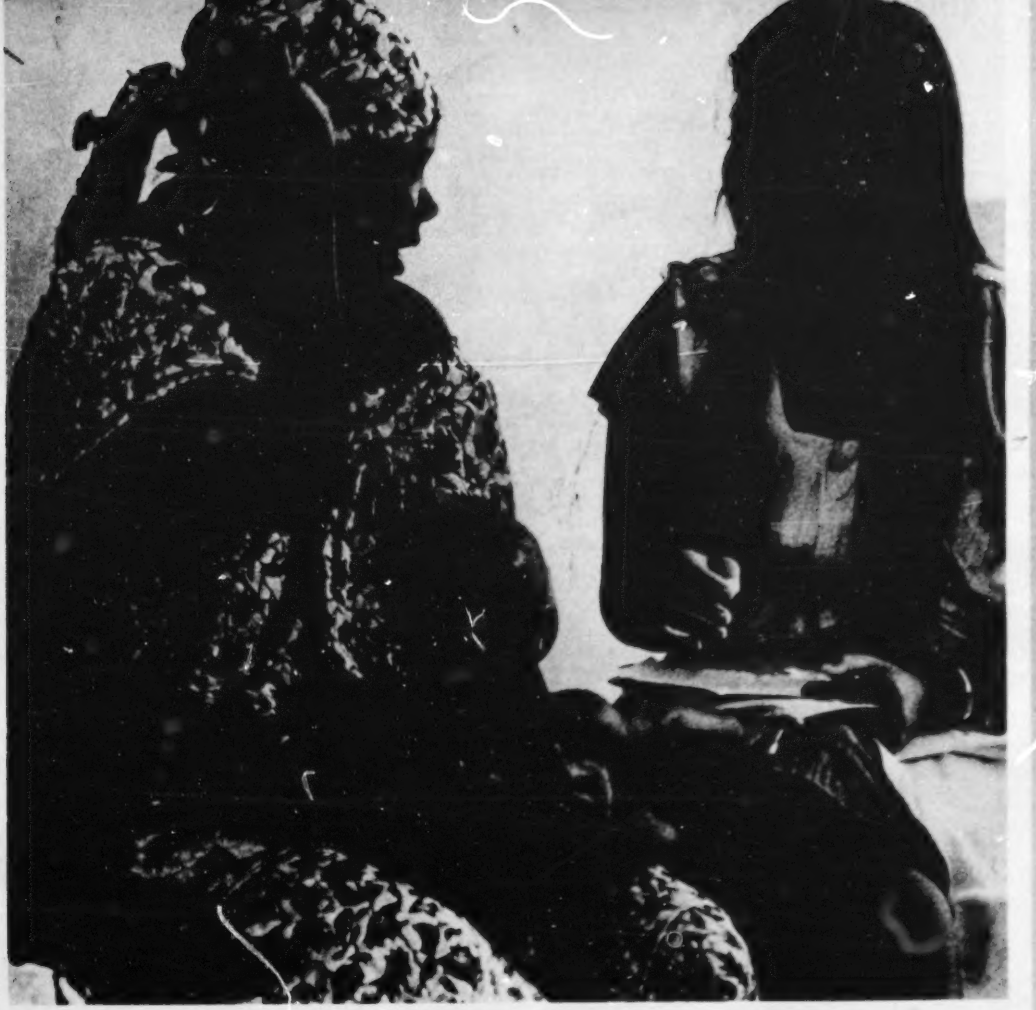
In the late '60s, ETS's involvement in oral proficiency testing deepened when the Peace Corps asked for help with its language testing program. At the time, the Peace Corps was teaching a vast array of languages, including obscure tongues like Dari, Fijian, and Chichewa, to thousands of volunteers at training centers in the U.S. and abroad. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) had been providing personnel to administer oral interview tests, but the demand had overwhelmed the institute's resources.

ETS was asked to assume responsibility for Peace Corps language testing, and senior staff members were trained in the FSI procedure and began testing volunteers. To handle the large volume, ETS then trained staff at the Peace Corps training centers to conduct and rate the interviews.

Increasingly, Peace Corps staffers found the procedure to be inappropriate for the Peace Corps' needs. Responses to a 1981 questionnaire sent to Peace Corps Language Training Center directors indicated that they also were dissatisfied.

The FSI interview procedure and scale are designed to evaluate speakers according to standards designed for highly sophisticated diplomatic communication. The Peace Corps, however, trains people who need to be able to converse with ordinary people about down-to-earth topics such as farming and livestock. Moreover, a command of the paralinguistic features of the local language, such as gestures, attitudes, body language, and eye contact, is often just as important as speaking ability.

ETS program administrator Russell Webster and his associates began developing an



interview procedure that would be more closely related to the jobs volunteers were expected to do. The Peace Corps supplied ETS with nine different clusters of job categories, and a tenth cluster of jobs not easily categorized, and ETS constructed new oral interview exams around these clusters.

Unlike most oral interviews, in which the subject's performance is assessed either by the interviewer or by a grader listening to a tape, the ETS/ Peace Corps procedure calls for a Peace Corps assessor to observe and rate an interview conducted by a native-speaking interlocutor. The rater observes paralinguistic behavior as well as speaking ability, while the interlocutor concentrates his full attention on the conversation.

"The interlocutor is trained to react spontaneously to the candidate," says Webster. "There are situations where the interlocutor responds by gestures only, and the Peace Corps candidate must use both words and gestures to communicate fully."

At first, candidates answer questions relating to a booklet of job-related pictures. If they do well, the interlocutor will set up some role-playing situations. Candidates are rated according to the highest level at which they can perform consistently and are graded for both speaking and paralinguistic ability.

The rating scale is related to the scale developed by the Common Yardstick Project, with increased sensitivity at the lower end, where most of the performances fall. Candidates are rated at the end of their 16-week training period, after six months in the field, and at the end of their two-year tour of duty.

"It will be some time before the ETS system is used," says Webster. "It has to be field-tested and then amended, revised, and validated. Then the first training sessions will have to be done and people will have to be certified as capable of conducting and rating the interviews."

novice levels. The "1" level was subdivided into three intermediate levels. The "2" level was subdivided into two advanced levels. Levels "3" and above were simply termed "Superior."

The Office of Education provided ETS with a grant to refine this scale further and adapt it for use in evaluating students' speaking proficiency. When the project was completed, the material was turned over to ACTFL, which has worked to disseminate the scale and train teachers in oral proficiency interviewing and rating techniques.

Under a 1981 grant from the Department of Education, ACTFL developed a series of workshops to train college teachers in oral proficiency testing and introduce them to the modified scale. The first workshops have covered French, German, Italian, and Spanish and have attracted faculty from all over the country.

"We have aimed our first workshops at teachers in higher education because they tend to have a higher level of skills and more impact on education," says ACTFL Executive Director C. Edward Scebold. "They train teachers and are responsible for local inservice programs."

ETS also sponsors a series of familiarization workshops in oral proficiency testing, and all major national and regional foreign language conferences have featured, or plan to feature, workshops in the field. The demand for oral proficiency training has become so great, in fact, that ETS is now training people to give still more ACTFL workshops. A program is being developed to certify testers and trainers, and long-range plans call for regional language proficiency centers to train people in the field and maintain records.

"The purpose of language proficiency testing," says the *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual*, "is to assess the examinee's language performance in terms of the extent to which he or she is able to use the language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations."

Administering the tests properly is both a skill and an art and requires considerable preparation. The examiner begins with simple conversational ploys to put the interviewee at ease and then shifts to higher levels in order to find the highest

that the candidate can sustain. Role playing is usually included. The interviewer must consider candidate fluency, pronounciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, syntax, and ease of expression. All this must be accomplished in 15 to 20 minutes.

The Quiet Revolution

The promotion of oral proficiency workshops has a purpose beyond enabling teachers to master this delicate procedure. The ultimate objective is nothing less than a permanent restructuring of the way

languages are taught in this country. Supporters hope eventually to make oral proficiency a primary goal of all programs at the high school and college levels.

"We feel that the main outcome of language instruction should be the ability to use a language in speaking and listening," says Scebold. "I'm not trying to suggest that reading is not important. For people in some jobs it is more important to be able to read fluently. For most people, however, verbal skills are more important."

"We want to get schools to emphasize oral skills," says Woodford. "We don't care how they do it. As more people learn about the ACTFL/ETS scale, they will see that they can and should develop the oral proficiency skills of students and that the means are available to assess them.

"The purpose of the oral proficiency test is to determine how well students speak and use the language. If teachers learn that they can set measurable goals for students, they will emphasize this in their programs. We have no brief with methodology—we are interested in results."

"Even though high school classes have become more conversationally oriented,

there is a general concern that they are not proficient in producing results," says Stansfield. "The scale provides a model for second language acquisition. It shows where a student is at a specific time so that the teacher can develop activities to move him or her up."

"The bottom line," says Scebold, "is that we have to be accountable. Kids spend four years in a language program, and then go overseas and find that they can't use the languages they supposedly learned.

"This notion of accountability is catching on. New York State may institute a junior high school language requirement and is looking at the proficiency model as a way to organize it. Texas has passed a law that, starting in 1986, a graduate from an education program in foreign languages will have to demonstrate a certain, as yet undefined, level of proficiency. During the next three years we will work with the state to help establish a cut-off point and to train proficiency interviewers."

The College Board also supports a proficiency-based model as the basis for the foreign language recommendations in its 1983 guidelines on *Academic Preparation for College*. The guidelines were drawn up as part of the Board's Educational EQuality Project, a 10-year effort to strengthen the quality of secondary education. They state that "college entrants will need proficiency in another language" and give top priority to the development of speaking and listening skills.

Courses emphasizing oral proficiency, however, require teachers with considerable fluency in the language being taught. In fall 1983, ETS will conduct a survey, sponsored by the International Division of the Department of Education, to determine the oral proficiency of high school teachers throughout the nation. The self-assessment questonnaire consists of biographical items designed to gauge the respondents' exposure to the language, their training, and their experience in using it as well as items that assess the ability to perform certain tasks, such as ordering a meal in a restaurant or giving directions to a cabbie. Plans call for teachers at approximately 1,000 high schools to be sampled.

"There is reason to believe that oral ability is very important for language teachers and that many teachers may be deficient; however, there is no hard evidence," says project director Thomas L. Hilton. "We are going to great lengths to make sure the privacy of teachers will be preserved, so that they will feel free to respond candidly. They will fill out the instruments, without signing them, and send them directly to us. Their supervisors will never see them."

For teachers who wish to improve their speaking ability, ACTFL offers immersion workshops that run for several days at its national meetings. State foreign language organizations also sponsor immersion workshops and immersion camps. In immersion settings, only the foreign language is spoken, providing teachers with an opportunity to improve speaking skills in an intensified environment. This effort reflects ACTFL's commitment to increasing the number of teachers capable of running classes in which oral proficiency is the prime objective. "We did a survey of teachers and found that many lack confidence in their speaking ability," says Scebold. "Most feel that their competence is slipping because they only speak at an intermediate level in their classes. Our immersion workshops provide them with the opportunity to sharpen their skills."

BLUE RIBBON LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

The need for topnotch teachers is evident in *Award-Winning Foreign Language Programs*, a survey of 50 of the nation's top foreign language programs published by ACTFL in 1981. The program descriptions written by William D. Sims and Sandra B. Hammond indicate that at the core of each successful effort is an imaginative, talented, and highly committed staff of teachers.

About the program at Sheridan (Wyoming) High School, they write, "A dynamic well-qualified staff has devised a number of measures for making language study attractive and meaningful." At Cherry Creek High School in Englewood, Colorado, "A well-trained staff is capable of developing a high degree of fluency among the students through the

predominant use of the target languages." The staff at Fort Johnson High School in Charleston, South Carolina, is "certifiably crazy—and exemplary."

"The Fort Johnson program," they explain, "is a self-propelled burst of enthusiasm, histrionics, and hard work... The staff specializes in the kind of controlled unpredictability essential to successful language instruction. At Fort Johnson, the teachers *are* the program."

Most of the programs have a conversational orientation, although a variety of approaches are employed to achieve the desired results. The Midland (Texas) Independent School District attempts to individualize its instruction to meet the particular needs of each student. Brattleboro (Vermont) Union High School offers a wide variety of elective courses, such as French Detective Fiction, L'Humour Francais, and Great Spanish Novels, to generate interest among upper-level students. Cupertino (California) High School uses computers to enhance its German classes. Many of the schools have highly ambitious foreign exchange programs that enable advanced students to hone their conversational skills abroad.

Still, the key element in each program's success is the staff. Two examples are particularly striking. Seymour (Wisconsin) Community High School and West Branch (Iowa) High School are both rural schools with foreign language programs that almost folded until they were revived by dynamic teachers. Today, both programs are regarded as among the most outstanding in the nation.

Seymour Community High School

At Seymour Community High, a junior-senior high school of 3,000 students, Lowell Hoeft knew his one-man French program was threatened with extinction when enrollments dropped to 10 percent of the student body. He initiated an all-out campaign to interest eighth graders in the program, which begins in ninth grade. A French Day was established during which eighth graders are dazzled by a lively presentation designed to convince them to study French. Enrollments increased dramatically, and one-third of all ninth graders currently enroll in French.

To back up his sales pitch, Hoeft teaches an outstanding sequence of French

TOM HILTON

"There is reason to belive that oral ability is very important for language teachers and that many teachers may be deficient . . ."

courses emphasizing practical language skills. His classroom is crammed with artifacts from France, such as money, wine bottles, and menus, and he uses a variety of imaginative techniques to promote student involvement. When teaching reflexive verbs, for instance, Hoeft's students might be asked, in French, to brush their hair and then a partner's. To encourage extemporaneous language use, students are also asked to perform impromptu skits illustrating practical problems, such as ordering food in a French restaurant.

"I try to make the classes as personal and realistic as possible," says Hoeft. "I know their parents, brothers, and sisters, so I can tie things to their personal backgrounds.

"I attempt to balance reading and conversation but I really do stress speaking, particularly in the first two years. Students see immediate results by speaking the language rather than by reading. Besides, only 15 percent of our students go on to college, so I don't gear the course to college-bound students."

Hoeft returns to France every summer to polish his French and keep his knowledge of the culture up-to-date. In addition, every year he takes a group of students to France during spring break. "All my students know that if they stay in the program they will have an opportunity to go to France," says Hoeft.

Hoeft's success as a French teacher has been evident in the annual American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) competition for students. Two years ago the school had a national winner, and it has had regional and state winners every year it has entered. This year all three of the Wisconsin French I winners were from Hoeft's program.

West Branch High School

At West Branch High School, a country school of approximately 280 students, David Schmidt resorted to even more radical means to save a dying Spanish program and turn it into an outstanding one that has gained national recognition. When he began teaching at the school 10 years ago, only 40 students were enrolled in all four years of Spanish, the only language offered. Schmidt traced the problem to student discontent with the audiolingual textbooks that had been used since 1956. In particular, students resented the old-fashioned memorization exercises.

"We asked for new books, and the administration said 'no,'" says Schmidt. "The principal said, 'Why not write your own?' I'm not sure whether he was serious, but I was young and enthusiastic, so I did."

With the help of his students, Schmidt developed what has become a series of 15 packets of text covering all four years of Spanish. The packets, continuously updated, reflect his student's suggestions regarding the kind of material they would like to study. They wanted a text they could own and take with them after they left school, and the packets filled that need. They wanted the material to be personal, practical, and challenging. Much of the content deals with local interests, such as agriculture.

According to Sims and Hammond, "The packets that make up the program are witty, highly personalized dialogues with the students, illustrated with clever drawings that encourage the students to visualize concretely syntactical and lexical items, while encouraging active and extemporaneous use of Spanish. Such an emphasis on the practical use of the language through acquisition of communicative skills is constant throughout the four-year packet system."

The packets are produced within the school at very little cost. Much of the typing is done in a secretarial class for students who are taking Spanish. The art work is done by students, and the entire publication is run off on a multilith press in the industrial arts department. One full set of packets contains 3,000 pages, including workbook exercises. The school's total budget for the packets is $50.

According to Schmidt, the Spanish program now enrolls 149 of the 280 students in the school. This year an honors program is being started that will provide extra work and a special seminar for interested students, so Schmidt is now writing new material.

"There's a lot to be said for youth and naivete," says Schmidt. "I don't know what it would take to get me back to a textbook now."

Sims and Hammond, who observed

Schmidt's classes, found them all of "high quality," and they report that "the students were almost uniformly enthusiastic in their attempts to use the target language." Schmidt enlivens his classes through the use of imaginative dialogues, role playing, and dramatic presentations. Standards are tough. At the end of level II, students are required to give 10-minute talks in Spanish on subjects of their choice. The talks are judged by the teacher and members of the Spanish IV class, and students must receive at least a "C" before they are allowed to enter Spanish III.

Schmidt does not neglect grammar despite his emphasis on conversational skills. "There is a lot of structural grammar taught," he says, "because I suspect that it isn't being taught anywhere else. Kids don't know what a noun is. They want to know why all the adjectives are changing."

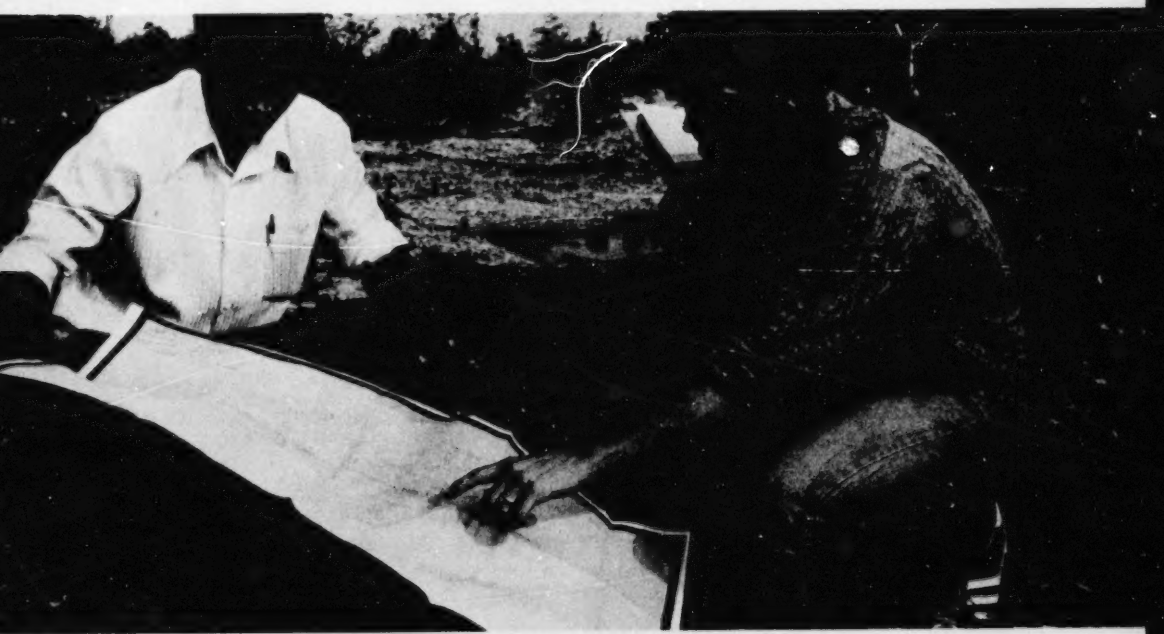
"In general," write Sims and Hammond, "the success of the West Branch Spanish program mirrors, in an extreme way, an important commonality of all successful programs: dynamic, creative teaching. In the case of the West Branch program, success is directly a function of the imagination and tenacity of David Schmidt; the program is his creation and thus reflects his philosophy of teaching as well as his educational values."

IMMERSION PROGRAMS

Perhaps the most revolutionary advance in foreign language education, however, is occurring on the elementary level. During the '70s, immersion programs began to spring up in various school districts throughout the country—some in affluent suburbs, others in big cities. They essentially involve teaching at least a large part of the school's curriculum in a foreign language.

All immersion programs begin in elementary schools, although some are now being extended into junior and senior high schools. The relatively simple curriculum in the early grades ensures that English-speaking children will not be completely lost when they walk into a classroom where the teacher speaks only a foreign language. Students in the earliest grades are best able to pick up accurate accents and pronunciation. After a certain age—experts differ on the exact year—it becomes virtually impossible to learn a language without an accent.

The inspiration for immersion programs in this country came from Canada, where certain provinces, such as New Brunswick, have been providing French immersion programs for English-speaking students and English immersion for French-



speaking students for as long as 20 years. The movement began in a suburb of Montreal when English-speaking parents realized their children would need a fluency in French they weren't attaining in conventional language programs. They suggested immersion, and when the administrators turned them down, they elected their own school board and implemented the program. From there, the practice has spread to much of eastern Canada.

For years ETS has worked with the Canadian government to develop French and English achievement tests for the schools. In New Brunswick, ETS adapted the FSI scale so that it would be sensitive enough to measure the ability of high school seniors to speak French. This became known as the New Brunswick scale. ETS is currently working with New Brunswick education authorities to help them evaluate their immersion program and to develop another, more sensitive, scale for use at the junior high school level.

New descriptions of ability are also being developed for the program. "The FSI scale measures the ability to talk about such things as politics, but this is not relevant to kids," says ETS's Lee L. Schroeder. "We have to find ways to describe what they do."

The Culver City Program

The first immersion program in the United States was started by the Culver City, California, school district in 1971 at the instigation of two UCLA professors who had observed the St. Lambert Elementary School immersion program in Montreal. The researchers were impressed by the fact that students in the Canadian program became highly proficient in French and seemed to be helped in learning English by the experience.

The Culver City program in Spanish, modeled after the St. Lambert program, currently is housed in the La Ballona Elementary School. Approximately 150 students participate. Kindergarten and first grade are taught entirely in Spanish, and an hour of English reading is introduced in second grade. To ensure the development of grammar and writing skills, 40 percent of the curriculum is taught in English in grades four through six.

In kindergarten the teachers speak only Spanish, and praise attempts by students to do the same, although they are still allowed to speak English. In first grade they are expected to speak Spanish, and by second or third grade they can communicate fluently. Subjects such as math and reading are taught as usual, except that they are taught in Spanish.

"We have started gathering data," says Principal Eugene Ziff. "In most cases the kids come out being able to read, write, and speak Spanish and keep their English skills, on average, at or above the national norm. They also perform above the district's norms."

These results are typical of immersion programs. Nancy Rhodes of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., has been monitoring the progress of students in the 12 districts that offer immersion programs. She reports, "In the second and third grades, immersion students may score lower in English than other students, but by the fifth or sixth grades they score as well or better."

Her findings are confirmed by Gabriel Jacobs, principal of the Oakview Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, which has a nine-year-old immersion program. Fifty-five percent of the students at Oakview receive their education in French. The program begins in first grade, although next year it will be extended to kindergarten. For the first few months, students are allowed to speak English, although the teacher will repeat all of their comments in French. In December, however, the teacher tells them that they must speak in French or not speak at all. Of course, the teacher provides help with difficult words and phrases.

Jacobs says that some children experience a lag in reading comprehension, but this disappears by the third grade. During the first three years the differences between English and French usages, such as in capitalization, are pointed out, but beginning in fourth grade, English grammar is taught in English.

He points out that an immersion program is cheaper to run than a program offering partial instruction in a language. A partial program necessitates adding a teacher for special language instruction,

whereas in an immersion program only the regular classroom teacher—in this case one who teaches in a second language—must be paid. The only extra costs are those for second-language teaching materials, and these are essentially one-shot costs to start up the class.

Jacobs makes a strong pitch for early foreign language learning that has a conversational orientation. "Children learn to speak English first, then they learn it academically," he says. "The same should be true of a foreign language. Who learns to speak by learning vocabulary lists and grammar? If you learn to converse, you can learn the grammar later."

"In many ways, the foreign language teaching crowd are the worst enemies of gaining communicative competence," he adds. "College people often feel that the only thing worth studying is the literature. It's important, but it's not the only thing worth studying."

Jacobs advocates immersion as early as possible in the educational process. "The Canadians," he says, "have never had success with late immersion. If you start children in a foreign language early, they will have more of a chance for in-depth development in the language and use it in the richest way."

Immersion and Desegregation

In Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and San Diego, immersion programs were initiated as part of voluntary desegregation efforts. District administrators hoped that elementary schools with immersion programs would serve as magnets attracting pupils from all over the district.

The Cincinnati program, started in 1974, now enrolls approximately 2,500 students, making it the largest immersion program in the country. Nine elementary schools currently offer immersion programs—one in German, three in French, and five in Spanish. All graduates continue in an immersion program at one of the middle schools.

Sixty percent of the students in the Cincinnati district are from minorities, and this percentage is maintained throughout the immersion program. None of the schools offers total immersion, however. The amount of language instruction may vary from 70 minutes per day in some schools to a half day of immersion in as many as four schools beginning in the fall of 1983.

According to program supervisor Mimi Met, the only problem is finding first-rate elementary school teachers who are fluent in a foreign language. "We didn't just want anyone who had a background in foreign languages and elementary education. We wanted someone who could do a good job delivering the program. Some of our staff are people fluent in a second language who have gone back to school to get elementary certification."

(continued on page 24)

Colleges Sponsor Foreign Language Competitions

Some colleges have begun to provide support for high school language programs by offering study incentives through contests and competitions. Kent State University and New York University, for instance, both sponsor declamation contests for high school foreign language students.

The foreign language forensic competition held by Rider College in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, is illustrative. More than 2,000 high school students from New Jersey and southeast Pennsylvania participate in the annual competition, designed to encourage the development of oral skills at the high school level. Students compete in categories including recitations of published and original works, "college bowls" testing knowledge of language and culture, dramatic interpretations and original skits. There is also a written test that enables students to display abilities other than oral skills.

The top students receive certificates of merit, and schools with the most winners also win awards. "Students compete in small groups, and every section has a winner," says William Meads, former chairman of the Rider College foreign language department. "We also give plaques to the three high schools with the greatest number of winners. The purpose of the event is to encourage students, so we like to have a lot of winners.

"Many teachers have told us they are pleased to have the tournament, and the students are very enthusiastic. The kids who are not graduating make their plans for the next year on the bus going home."

More than 2,000 high school students attend foreign language competition at Rider College (left), where they compete in events that include dramatic interpretations (right).

Met reports that the Cincinnati schools have entered into an arrangement to bring in three Belgian elementary teachers next year to help meet the needs of the still-expanding program.

Gabriel Jacobs had to resort to a similar strategy with his program in Silver Spring. His faculty are all high school or college French teachers who were retrained to become elementary school teachers. Next year the school will be getting its first teacher from Canada.

Even as enthusiastic a supporter of the concept as Nancy Rhodes concedes that a shortage of teachers could limit the spread of the immersion concept. "I don't know if it would ever work nationwide. Some districts already have a hard time finding teachers."

Nevertheless, she reports that the concept continues to find supporters and that immersion programs will be inaugurated next year in Eugene, Oregon; Peoria, Illinois; and Fort Worth, Texas.

Mimi Met urges that education schools recognize the growing popularity of immersion programs and begin viewing the teacher shortage as an opportunity. "We hope," she says, "that colleges will recognize the need for people trained in this area and begin encouraging kids to go into it."

IN THE COLLEGES

Colleges generally have not emphasized communicative skills to the same degree as high schools. Most departments still cling to curriculums oriented to literature rather than communicative competence, and this limits the availability of education school graduates with sufficient oral proficiency to teach a conversational language course at the high school level.

"The ones who call the shots are those in college foreign language departments," says Scebold. "There is a problem with teacher certification because, despite all the talk about proficiency-based requirements, most colleges still emphasize the study of literature rather than proficiency."

Robert Carter, coordinator of languages for the Midland Independent School District in Texas, warns that perceived pressure from colleges may be leading some high schools to return to a more traditional literary approach, rolling back some of the progress that has been made toward developing practical language skills. "Some secondary schools are returning to a foreign language curriculum with more emphasis on reading and writing," he says. "Foreign languages in high schools hit the skids when colleges stopped requiring them of entering students, and now that colleges are reintroducing this requirement, some high schools are returning to a curriculum with more emphasis on reading and writing because they feel colleges want students prepared to read literature. Reading is also easier for the teachers to teach."

Still Scebold believes that colleges may eventually have to shift the orientation of their courses. "I think we can make an impact on higher education. Some states have wiped out tenure. Undergraduate and graduate faculty are beginning to realize that without students they will lose their jobs. The bottom line is the consumer. People are graduating from college foreign language programs and getting hired in fields demanding proficiency. They are not meeting the expectations of the employers, and this gets back to the schools. The University of Michigan has just set up a foreign-language-in-business program, and we expect to see more programs like this."

There are, of course, a few who argue that all this concern about foreign language studies will soon seem beside the point. Computers are currently being developed, they claim, that will be able to handle language translation in the near future, liberating all people from the necessity of learning second and third languages.

Many doubt, however, that technology will ever diminish the value of studying and acquiring foreign languages. As a vehicle for understanding divergent cultures, they say, foreign language studies can only gain importance in an increasingly interdependent world. To the extent that all great works of literature are essentially untranslatable, foreign language studies will continue to be invaluable to those who strive to be literate beyond their own tongue. With the need for accurate interpersonal communication growing in every arena, particularly business and politics, the utility of foreign language studies should transcend all foreseeable technological innovations.

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